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S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

ST. LAWRENCE JEWRY,

On THURSDAY, *April 30*, 1767,

BEFORE

His Royal Highness Edward Duke of York,

P R E S I D E N T,

AND THE

G O V E R N O R S

OF THE

LONDON-HOSPITAL,

A T

M I L E - E N D,

FOR THE

RELIEF of all Sick and Diseased Persons, especially
MANUFACTURERS, and SEAMEN in MERCHANT-
SERVICE, &c.

W. Woodfall
By WILLIAM, *Lord Bishop of Gloucester.* K

Published at the Request of the PRESIDENT and GOVERNORS.

L O N D O N:

Printed by H. WOODFALL, in *Pater-Noster-Row*,
M.DCC.LXVII.



I CORINTH. Ch. XIII. ver. 13.

—*The greatest of these is Charity.*

I Shall not, at present, stay to consider the grounds and reasons of the preference here given to CHARITY above all the other Christian Virtues. Nor is such an enquiry needful, since the obvious nature of *Charity*, as it signifies UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE, shews, that it must needs be at the head of human Virtues; *Universal Benevolence*, which prefers the good of the Whole to any of its parts, being of the essence, as it is the end of all Virtue.

If I should venture to prelude what I have to say on this occasion, by observing, that *Benevolence* is the characteristic Virtue of ENGLISHMEN, I might, perhaps, be thought to flatter a People now fatally over-run with Vice and Impiety.

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But justice is due to all : and may be paid with honour as well to ourselves as to others ; as well to our Friends as our Enemies. So that, with a fair boast, I may repeat it, “ This sovereign Virtue is native to us, and our own ; and the fantastic Follies, now most in fashion, are of foreign growth, and imported from abroad.”

As soon as ever England had broken asunder the chains of Ignorance and Superstition, our National Benevolence began to shew itself, and kindle into warmth. The objects most intimate and pressing, naturally became, in the order they arose, the successive care of this sovereign Virtue.

Hence it was that the interests of PURE RELIGION, the thing most productive of human happiness, first awakened, and continued to excite our whole attention ; till we had thoroughly defecated the celestial fountain of FAITH from the poisonous dregs of ROME. This noble labour occupied English Charity throughout the whole period between EDWARD the VIth. and JAMES the Ist.

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The next object of this benevolent spirit was CIVIL LIBERTY, the Daughter of *Religion*, and, after her, the most prolific of earthly blessings. For this, the generous Englishman long toiled: and, by a vast expence of blood and treasure at length secured for his Posterity—For his Posterity do I say? Or should I not rather say, for the human race in general? This glorious struggle for the service of mankind began under JAMES the Ist. continued long, and was happily ended under WILLIAM the III^d.

Our native Benevolence having thus provided for the WHOLE, in the security of those two capital blessings, RELIGION and CIVIL LIBERTY, now turned its gracious aspect upon the PARTS; and the SUFFERING POOR, ordained by Providence to bear the heaviest burthens of society, engaged their first and principal concern.

Then *Charity-Schools* for the education of youth; *Infirmaries* for the relief of the diseased; and *Hospitals* for the solace of old age, soon overspread this happy Island. And in these beneficent labours, hath this Godlike Spirit been employed from the reign of William III. to this present time.

Thus uniformly hath our native Charity kept opening and widening through several ages, till it embraced and took in all the great Objects of Universal Benevolence.

How perfectly this spirit got possession of the frame and faculties of Englishmen, may be seen from the most trifling, as well as from the most important circumstances. We may collect it from the very words of our language: ALMS-GIVING having, by a conversion of terms peculiar to the English tongue, usurped the very name of CHARITY. A plain indication of what our Forefathers felt to be the *motive*, and what they understood to be the *genuine motive* of ALMS-GIVING.

One principal branch of this sublime Virtue, which I am now intrusted to recommend to your favour and protection, are public Infirmaries for the disabled Poor.

But as a retentive purse is ever ingenious in starting objections, sometimes to the *manner of giving*, and sometimes again, to the *utility of the gift*; it will be incumbent on me, previously to remove both the one and the other of these obstructions.

We

We will begin with certain religious scruples to public and open contributions of this nature, from a text of Scripture ill understood, and worse applied. *When thou doest thine alms* (says our Blessed Master) *do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do—but when thou doest thine Alms, let it be in secret.*——Now this precept is greatly mistaken when it is understood to be an *exclusive direction*, how and in what manner the duty of alms-giving should be performed; as that its merit consisted in its being *done in secret*; and that it lost all its virtue when it came to the general knowledge of men. On the contrary, the Precept is only an *information* (given indeed, by way of *direction*) concerning the *disposition of mind*, necessary to make the Giver's Alms acceptable before God. The true meaning of the text being precisely this:——“ *Be*
“ *not as the Hypocrites*, who, devoid of all *bene-*
“ *volence*, and actuated either by superstition,
“ *self-interest*, or *vain-glory*, or perhaps by all
“ *of them together, seek only the praise of men;*
“ *and therefore sound a Trumpet before them,* to
“ *proclaim their alms.* But when thou ad-
“ *dressdest thyself to the performance of this duty,*
“ *let UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE possess thy soul,*
“ *as knowing that though thou bestow all thy*
“ *goods to FEED THE POOR, and have not CHARI-*
“ *TY,*

“ TY, *it profiteth thee nothing* : and knowing
 “ this, thou wilt naturally and without affecta-
 “ tion (when thou art not called upon, on a pro-
 “ per occasion like the present, *to let thy light*
 “ *shine before men*) *do thine alms in secret*. Not
 “ that doing them *openly* or in *secret* makes any
 “ difference in the merit of the action itself ;
 “ but that the sound of a flawed and faulty
 “ heart generally accompanies the *Trumpeter's*
 “ proclamation ; while the action of the *silent*
 “ *giver* modestly whispers the integrity of his
 “ purpose. Otherwise, when UNIVERSAL BENE-
 “ VOLENCE hath got possession of the heart, then
 “ Alms *done openly* must needs be best pleasing
 “ to our Heavenly Father ; as the Example
 “ spreads abroad the Spirit of Benevolence, and
 “ each *open giver* catches the sacred fire from an-
 “ other, till the whole Offering arises in one pure
 “ blaze of Charity, an Holocaust of the pious
 “ Heart to Heaven : as on the other hand, when
 “ it is superstition only which stimulates thee
 “ to this paltry sacrifice of *the praise of men*,
 “ thou wilt only add to the nullity of the ac-
 “ tion, the offence which accompanies its na-
 “ ture.”

The second objection is of a civil nature : *the*
legal provision for the Poor is objected to the
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necessity, if not to the utility, of these new and *voluntary establishments*.

But when the origin of that *provision* comes to be considered, it may possibly be seen, that these *new establishments* are the best means of removing the inconveniencies, which, in a course of time, have arisen from that beneficent, but ill-judged policy, of *providing for the Poor by law*.

Before the times of common sense and Reformation, a still-increasing superstition had brought an immensely disproportioned share of the landed property into the hands of Churchmen and other religious. But lands in *Mortmain* are a dead weight upon Commerce; which rarely rises, and can never flourish under so unfavourable an aspect. This, for many ages, filled the nation with Beggars. Indeed *begging* was the only Commerce it had. And it throve so well, and grew so fashionable, that whole *Orders of Religious*, when they had beggared others, turned beggars themselves; and, after despoiling the rich, did not blush to share the Alms with the Poor.

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In this general distress, the wealthy Monasteries opened their gates to a miserable starving people: who, being first reduced to indigence by the *Religious*, were afterwards supported by them in idleness; till an *Abby-Lubber* became the common name for one of the Monastic Leeches. And while Laymen seemed to have forgotten the plainest civil truth, *that Necessity was the mother of Invention*, Churchmen were successfully inculcating the greatest of religious absurdities, *that Ignorance was the mother of Devotion*.

When HENRY VIII. dissolved the *religious Houses*, and, by that means, restored civil Property to the uses of Commerce, the immense revenues which came into the Exchequer were soon dispersed and dissipated; partly in support of the measures of that daring Revolution; partly in the ill-judged projects of his childish ambition; and in part, in the indulgence of his luxurious pleasures.

But so clamorous were those Drones, the *Abby-Lubbers*, on the destruction of their hives, that the Crown found it necessary to insert in its grants of alienation, an express condition of *Hospitality*; which had no lasting effects; for now, the emancipated Church-estates perpetually
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changing hands, the charge upon them of Hospitality was soon forgotten or disregarded,

In the mean time COMMERCE, under the genial warmth of *Property in motion*, began to make its first struggles for birth. Trading Companies were formed; distant Voyages were attempted, and new Worlds discovered.

But Infant-Commerce is weak and feeble; and its hands unapt for Manufactures, the perennial source of national wealth: so that still, a numerous *Poor* remained untaught and unfed.

The glorious administration of a Woman, who took up her father's reins, after they had been slackened, first by Faction, and then by a returning Superstition, was intent to supply both these wants, by Law. But unskilful measures in providing against distress, soon took off the edge of Industry. And the law, which quarters the Poor on their several parishes, grew, in time, so intolerable a burthen, both on the landed and commercial Interests, and so difficult to be shaken off, that the Legislature hath now employed more than an age in seeking for the proper remedy, and hath not yet found it.

In this *inability*, the best relief, though it can operate but slowly, are these voluntary new erected *Establisments*, entirely formed and addressed to encourage *industry*, by providing a speedy cure to the maladies and disasters of the disabled Poor. From whence it appears, that the *legal provision* is so far from being an objection to their continuance, that an increase of them is the only means, we have at present, of putting some stop to the growing mischiefs of that *provision*.

Thus we see how civil Policy and religious Charity concur in favour of these *new Establisments in general*. What remains, is only to recommend to you the object of our present care ; an Establishment, that (like all other of the same kind which have the Poor for their subject) doth honour to humanity : and by the peculiar nature of the Institution, hath the advantage of being most beneficial to a commercial people ; as taking in all *Labourers for the Public*, whether by SEA or LAND ; whether disabled by accidents or debilitated by disease. For, against these necessary Servants of Society all the elements seem to have conspired. They seize the *Workman and Artificer* at home ; sometimes by the baleful qualities of the materials on which he

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is employed ; sometimes by the blasting heats of furnaces and forges, in the midst of which, the process of his artful industry, in giving form and fashion to those tortured materials is carried on ; and sometimes again by the damp of mines, and the rotten exhalations of woods and marshes, to which, in his useful labours, he is unhappily confined. They pursue the *Sailor* abroad ; and the very air necessary to a prosperous course, becomes destructive of his constitution ; now by a load of corrosive salts ; and now again, by the change of climates in extreme, made unfit for respiration.

Such are the objects of this noble Charity ; to which no motives of recommendation, whether divine or human, can be wanting.

I. If we seek them in RELIGION, Solomon is at hand to tell us, *That who so hath pity on the Poor, lendeth to the Lord* * : And a wiser than he assures us, that what we do to our distressed brethren, will be reckoned as done to himself ; Our gracious Master being pleased to exalt and enoble ALMS *to the Poor* into OBLATIONS *to himself*.

* Prov. xix. 17.

And though from the attributes of the Godhead in general, we can well account for so honoured an acceptance of human alms ; yet there is another reason, peculiarly relative to the present dispensations of Providence, which will explain the high encomium here bestowed upon this Virtue.

In social and civil life, under Government political, (which God declares * to be his *ordinance* as well as man's) the far greater part of those whereof it is composed, are, by the inevitable order of things, condemned to a state of labour, distress, and penury. The Common Father of mankind has therefore graciously condescended to consider himself as responsible for the relief and support of all in this humble station ; and, on this account, hath earnestly and particularly recommended them to the care and protection of the *Rich* ; to whom, as to the *Stewards* of his bounty and abundance, he hath *intrusted*, rather than *given*, the goods of this world : Goods, which GOD, at first, created unappropriate ; and NATURE threw in common to all her children.

Indeed,

* Rom. xiii. 2. 1 Pet. ii. 13.

Indeed, we can never sufficiently adore the Father of mercy, who, in the tenderness of his Providence, hath thus set to his own account, whatever is disbursed by these his *Stewards*, upon such, who by reason of the wants which *his own Ordinance* hath occasioned, are under his more especial care and protection.

II. If, in the second place, we seek our motives in the bosom of HUMAN VIRTUE, these *Stewards* of God's bounty, the *Rich*, will never want reasons of *humanity* and *justice* towards their Brethren, as well as of *piety* and *gratitude* to their Lord and Benefactor, for the ready and chearful discharge of their *Trust*; when they consider that the lower ranks in society (on whom distress and penury are fatally entailed) had this hard measure assigned unto them by Providence, that the *Rich* might enjoy the Blessings of social life in greater plenty, in a more improved condition, and in fuller security than they were even at first poured out on man from the lap of God's prolific Substitute, NATURE: For, to the toil, the ingenuity, and the ready habits of the hardy *Poor*, both by land and water, are owing the abundance and stability of those *artificial accommodations* which society procures. So that were it not for the constant toil of the
Labourer,

Labourer, the Sailor and the Artificer, the man most indulged in the wanton gifts of fortune, would soon find himself, in the midst of all his proud connexions, as ill accommodated in his person and in his domestic, as a savage Indian Chief amidst his wastes and desarts.

III. But, thirdly, if neither piety, humanity, nor even the interests of luxury and commerce, have force sufficient to open either our hearts or hands in favour of those who impair their health and shorten their lives in destructive toil and hazardous adventures, to provide for our ease and pleasures ; we should consider, how our very SAFETY (in the peace and order of society) is concerned in this soothing relief, thus beneficently afforded to the poor distressed.

One of the most marvellous circumstances in the life of that inconsequent prodigious creature, Man, is, that the Populace in all governments can feel, and yet do so patiently abide and groan under toil and penury ; distresses sustained by the *Many*, for the support of the *Few* in insolence and riot.

The force of human laws alone is insufficient to account for this dead calm in the
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most furious and impatient of all wild creatures,
Man in distress.

The Populace were never able to comprehend either the *nature* or *end* of National Laws ; their *use* to the whole, or their *necessity* to the several parts ; and, therefore, could have no forceable inducement to pay them reverence. On the other hand, they were never so stupid as not to understand that *human laws*, like a thread of flax before a flame, vanish and disappear before popular commotions.

What is it, then, do you ask, that hath so long restrained this fierce and agonizing part of Civil Society, in which all power really resides ; and from which it is fetched, by their Rulers, to be employed against themselves ? What is it, do you ask, that first tamed brutal Man, and disarmed the fury of an enraged multitude, and hath ever since restrained them, while murmuring under so unequal a partition of the free blessings of Providence, from using this power in their own quarrel ; to shake off their burthens, to reassume the *Commonalty of Nature*, to level all the boundaries of Property, and throw social life into disorder and confusion ? What could it be, but the powerful charm of RELIGION ? A charm which
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makes the Laws sacred, and the Supreme Magistrate adored.

But now, RELIGION having lost its hold on the Populace, (amongst whom a new set of Opinions hath been inculcated to encourage their practices) some *Succedaneum* will be found necessary to supply its place, till it can regain its usual force. And what so natural and efficacious as these NEW ESTABLISHMENTS, the first-fruits of CHARITY ; which, in the absence of FAITH, and during the loss of HOPE, may supply their place, and restrain the madness of a desperate people. For while they see the higher stations in society thus condescending, and even proud to discharge the office of their Guardians, zealous to make their distressed condition fit as easy on them as the nature of Society will permit, and the tenderest pity can procure, the Commonalty will be reconciled to their station ; and, though neither oversatisfied, nor, perhaps over grateful, will yet cease, in any turbulent way, to malign the happier lot of those who bend their care and employ their wealth, to drive away want and distress from the habitations of the INDUSTRIOUS POOR.

Now, would we regard our *new Establishments* in this view, we should have a sufficient answer to the *Objection* arising from the growing multiplicity of them.

They are, we have shewn, a *Succedaneum*, and the only one we have, to that great bond of Society, RELIGION: a *partial* extension of it, therefore, will hardly be sufficient. The Charity must spread and enlarge itself till it encompass the *whole*, in order to enable it to supply the place of that natural and more efficacious *tye*, RELIGION, now loosened in most parts, but quite shattered and broken in that where its strength was most needful, I mean, the *Populace*.

But this is not all: these Establishments *abound* in their uses; not only such as are public and general, which have been already explained, but private and particular likewise, as we shall see.

Where every good man is his own almoner, compassion is always readier to bestow, than prudence and circumspection to distribute. It relieves labouring humanity when we ease an object in distress. But the judgment (when-

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ever we condescend to be governed by it) always with-holds its assent, till the object appear *worthy* our care and attention. And were the judgment more consulted, we should not, at this very hour, have virtuous compassion, by a false pity, so much abused, as to become, instead of a blessing, a public mischief ; as it is in the relief of common-vagrants and street-beggars.

The charitable rich man is, as we have said, the *chosen Substitute* of God ; to supply what, in the common course of his Providence, hath, for wise reasons, been left imperfect and deficient. It is of his office, therefore, to satisfy justice and mercy, in the support of distressed Virtue, before he allows the tender sentiments of a constitutional compassion, to administer to the alleviation of suffering vice.

For these reasons, we shall, if we be wise as well as pious, make these *public Charities* the Treasuries of our private Alms ; as being well assured that what is there lodged, will be dispensed in such a manner as may best advance the national interests ; may best serve the sacred ends of Religion ; and best satisfy our own bountiful and humane dispositions.

And

And if, amongst these various *Establisments*, there be some whose principal objects are the wretches, who, by their vicious and intemperate appetites, have brought disease and misery on themselves, even these may fairly plead our pity, since they caught the infection of their immoral habits from the depraved Example of their *Betters*.

But the distinguished *Charity*, which I am at this time to recommend to your protection, is of a very different nature. It is, in a word, the most humane, most useful, and most deserving the attention of all good men ; as it is best calculated to produce the satisfactory and salutary purposes which the wisest *Establisments* of this kind profess to aim at.

A still further inducement to support these Charities is the present state of the *Public Manners* ; which are seen by all to be in so profligate a condition, as to require some attonement for insulted Truth and violated Virtue. The most natural indeed and efficacious, is the amendment of our lives and reformation of our vicious habits : yet, while that is working (and it is always a work of time) as there is apparent need of some intermediate deprecation of the wrath of Heaven, we are unable to conceive any more acceptable service to the God of mercy and compassion,

sion, than the relief of his favourite Creature, *Man*, struggling under the rigour of his wise and necessary Dispensation.

But then, let no superstitious fancies that our habitual vices may be indulged under the ample cloak of Charity, defeat these hopeful means of a beginning reconciliation with our offended Master. For though *Charity* or *benevolence* hides the faults of *others* from the severity of our censure, yet *Charity* or *Alms-giving* is totally unable to conceal *our own* from the observance of our all-righteous Judge. Indeed, the only cover for these, or, to speak more properly, the discharge of all their stains, is FAITH, is the BLOOD of Christ, working with *repentance* towards God. When FAITH, when the BLOOD of Christ, hath thus done its perfect work, and brought forth *repentance*, then we shall not be mistaken in concluding that one of the noblest fruits of *repentance* is of the growth of THIS ESTABLISHMENT; in giving covering to the naked, in dispensing food to the hungry, in pouring balm into the wounds of the afflicted, and administering cordials to the sick and languishing.

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May this be the constant employment of this humane *Establishment* ! and may the God of all Mercies prosper its generous Undertakings !

F I N I S.

